

**Appropriations Committee
Health Subcommittee
February 24, 2022**

**Public Hearing on:
House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
(Department of Developmental Services)**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jennifer Rosenzweig and I work at CCARC as a Director of Individual and Family Supports, overseeing the day programs. CCARC was founded in 1952 and we provide an array of services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the state budget as I am not able to attend the public hearing.

I want to thank you for the 4% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for community nonprofits that you fought to include in last year's budget. I'd like to ask you to honor the long term plan to address underfunding of community nonprofits and increase funding this year by an additional \$461 million, or 8% in total for FY23. The increase in this year's budget, while very much appreciated, has quickly been absorbed by rising costs. Over the last year, inflation rose by almost six percent, surpassing the COLA in the current year's budget.

This funding is needed now more than ever. Without it, we risk destabilizing our state's community service delivery system which has been upended by the pressures of COVID-19 and an exponential increase in the need for service in our communities. At the same time, we're facing unprecedented challenges recruiting and retaining staff of all skill levels and salaries.

I have seen, first hand, the effect that insufficient wages has had on our non-profit agencies. Many employees stay just long enough to gain some experience, then move on to state jobs or just higher paying jobs in general. We cannot continue to compete without the funding to do so. This is such a rewarding career, however it is getting harder and harder to stay, for myself and many others, simply because we cannot afford to. The long term affect is interruption in good services for a very vulnerable population when we are constantly training new staff. This is not an easy job. People do it because they love to help others and make a difference in their lives. Sadly, we are often put in the position of choosing between continuing to do a job that we love or being able to provide for our families.

Nonprofit Providers funded by the Department of Developmental Services are grateful for the efforts of the Appropriations Committee and Governor Lamont to address wage and funding issues specific to services for the Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities population. Last year's Group Home Settlement provided significant funding to increase the minimum wage for direct support staff in DDS agencies.

However, the group home settlement also created significant challenges:

- First, the terms of the settlement provided wage increases of as much as 11.6% for entry level staff, which next year will increase to 14.5%. But the agreement only provides a 3% increase to everyone else. Staff who before July were making only slightly above the new minimum, often people who had years or decades of experience or managing other staff, found themselves suddenly paid almost the same as a new hire.

- Second, the funding dedicated a pool of dollars to enhance employee benefits, but to date none of that funding has been disbursed to providers. We understand it to total less than half what providers have told DDS they would need.

Thank you,

*Jennifer Rosenzweig
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